Rage, reason and the honourable cause: a reply to Cowlishaw

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Abstract: *In 2003 Gillian Cowlishaw published a confrontational attack on a paper that I had published earlier on the subject of 'The politics of suffering' in Aboriginal Australia. While this reply takes up and answers her main points, it also examines her writings more generally and comes to a critical view of the use of the anthropological literary framework in the pursuit of political ends. The politicisation of anthropological and historical writing on Indigenous themes in recent decades has focused unwarranted attention on the moral position of the author, and has been running in reverse gear against the long-term trend of secularisation and objectification encouraged in Western thought since the Enlightenment. I suggest it's time for a little classicism.*

My 2001 paper, 'The politics of suffering', was an attempt to come to grips with why the quality of daily life had declined so appallingly for so many Aborigines since the liberalisation of Australian Indigenous policy began in the early 1970s. Gillian Cowlishaw has been a vigorous critic of that paper, and unless the reader has seen it, and Cowlishaw's response to it published in this journal (Cowlishaw 2003a), much of what follows may seem a little obscure. Cowlishaw has also been critical of my views elsewhere (Cowlishaw 2003b; 2004a:23, 143, 166, 200, 247). Here I respond only to the main strands of her critique.

In doing so I also venture to embark on an analysis of Cowlishaw's own particular kind of political and politicised anthropology of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships in Australia. This was necessary in order to try to understand the broader foundations of her critique, although limitations of time and space have kept this investigation to a minimum.

Perhaps Cowlishaw's broadest criticism of my words was that I had spoken out of turn (2003a:2 [abstract], 13):

> While scholarship cannot be divorced from either policy or the public, anthropologists should be wary of participating in debates that cannot 'solve' any 'problem' outside of their own articulation … We can do better than pretend to be able to change the world by entering debates whose terms are such that they cannot 'solve' any problem outside their own articulation.

However, as should become clear, I have no regrets about not remaining silent.

On silence

Cowlishaw (2003a:3) said that the 'voices of Aboriginal community members are distressingly absent from Sutton's essay'. Indigenous figures have had their own excellent hearing in the media on these topics without needing any encapsulating by anthropologists, however. As have many other academics I

have published works as transcriber and transla-
tor of Aborigines' words (e.g. Flinders & Sutton
1986; Goetz & Sutton 1986; Karntin & Sutton 1986;
Sutton 1991, 1997; Wolmby et al. 1990), but do not
feel obliged on principle to sprinkle quotations from
community members through every publication. To
adequately reflect the nature of social milieux by rep-
resentative quotations is also an extremely difficult
task. As has long been said, it does not seriously alter
the fact that the author still asserts authority over the
text by picking and choosing whose voice to encap-
sulate, and where. And balance is hard to achieve.
Cowlishaw's 2004 book is about the performance of
racial identities in Bourke but the voices quoted there
are almost entirely Aboriginal ones. As is so often the
case in her writings on race, the 'whitefellas' emerge
there largely as faceless, homogeneous, and voiceless
within the text. Their humanity is racialised out of the
picture through this contrast.[1]

But this is not principally because quotations
from their speech are absent. It is because they are
commonly treated as the typically one-dimension-
al objects of racist thought. In Cowlishaw's pres-
entations, 'whitefellas' don't operate in relation to
Aborigines on the basis of rationalities such as 'cultur-
al logic' or with noble motivations akin to Aborigines'
outrage at injustice, such as the European moral tradi-
tion of compassion, but through a 'white parental
fantasy of anxiety and control' that 'evokes violent
responses' (2003b:119, emphasis added). Whitefellas'
solicitous national discourse is 'an unstable mix of the
romantic and the statistical, a surface imagery that
mirrors the nation's desires and *fantasies*' (2003b:104,
emphasis added). There is 'a widespread narcissistic
desire … to improve the Indigenous population', a
desire which 'is above all preoccupied with *fantasies*
of Indigeneity' (2003b:108, emphasis added).

This is a false racialisation of others' behaviour.
Fantasy, desire and narcissism should not be used,
as Cowlishaw uses them, as essentially pejorative
terms restricted in application to whitefellas, given
their roles in our common humanity. And to say that
the helping impulse is only a *white narcissistic fantasy*
is to act publicly as a member of the polity in such a
way that, urbane and sophisticated as it might seem,
adds yet another layer of race-based pigeonholing to
the debate, and one that inseparably integrates the
sociological analysis and the moral judgement and
the pigeonholing.

And is the helping thing only a fantasy if the
helpers are whitefellas? Many Indigenous workers in
health, child care, youth work, education, the prison

systems and many other similar professions are there
because, among other things, they want to 'help their
own people'. Cowlishaw's message to such people
is, in effect, that they have been suckered into a self-
serving whitefella delusion.

Pathology, dysfunction?

Cowlishaw's (2003a:3) main specific concern in her
2003a article was with 'Sutton's reproduction of the
pathology model of Indigenous communities'. She
(2003a:4, 14, emphases added) referred to 'Sutton's
homogeneously miserable and desperate [Aboriginal]
communities' and to my production of 'an *unremit-
tingly* negative view of helpless and self-destruc-
tive communities'. This misrepresentation completely
ignores my denial of any such homogeneity or uni-
formity under the heading 'The problems of generali-
sation' (Sutton 2001:150–1). In fact, it looks curiously
like my own criticism (2001:163 n49) of the homo-
geneous and unremittingly miserable picture put
forward by Peter Howson. So how was such an ele-
mentary observational mistake made by Cowlishaw?
A straw man is usually the product of desire, not just
astigmatism.

I do not have a model of Indigenous communities
as pathological per se, but many of those I have lived
in or studied through reports have experienced seri-
ously pathological features during extended periods.
Nor do I have a model of modern urban societies as
being free from entrenched practices which can harm
the members of those societies. Freedom from self-
destructive and maladaptive practices is ever a matter
of degree.[2]

I see no significant difference between 'pathologi-
cal' and 'dysfunctional', as terms with clinical origins,
although it is true that the latter has become pretty
much the received term for many, especially remote,
communities, and recurs often for example in the
many works of Noel Pearson on the subject.[3] A signifi-
cant degree of public silence on some of the more
sensitive issues, such as child sexual abuse and the
violence and homicides committed on women, was
broken—by many in public life, including some very
un-silent Aboriginal women and men—at a certain
cost, first by Diane Bell and Topsy Nelson (1989),
by Judy Atkinson from at least 1990, and then in far
greater numbers during the early 2000s.[4] Cowlishaw
(2003a:3)—wording it a little gingerly—says that
'Sutton could be seen as giving academic author-
ity and respectability to a growing body of negative

stereotypes [of Aborigines]'. There was always going to be some stigmatisation by way of fallout, but I do not know anyone in a similar situation to my own who has regretted what they said. Why should stigmatisers be pandered to? It was worth the price.

Shockability

Cowlishaw (2003a:4, 9, 13) is at pains to distance herself from squeamish reactions to violence and abuse, revealing this, for example, in her ironic references to 'worried suburban dwellers' and 'bourgeois sensibilities'. Although confessing to experiencing 'rage and helplessness' when told of the sexual molestation of an infant, Cowlishaw (2003a:13) is happy to provide a sophisticated political-protest interpretation when it comes to mental cruelty, such as when a woman screams publicly at her child: 'I haven't got $2. Get, go on, get away, you little black cunt' (2004a:93). What are we supposed to make of an analysis which says that the emotional abuse of a child is taken by a 'black audience' to be 'designed to shock', a performance at which they grin and squirm (2004a:93)? Are we to understand it as the acceptable price of protest, the appropriate sacrifice for a display of rage, one aestheticised as a 'politicized black counter-narrative' (2004a:93)?

Without explicitly arguing some kind of moral justification of the behaviour, Cowlishaw's (e.g. 2004a:200) pattern, as here, is to find an explanation for Indigenous destructive behaviours in 'the logic of dissent'. This kind of rationalist and heroising language imbues these behaviours with a reasonableness and political honourableness that I have to say I find both ethnographically unconvincing and one that writes out, for example, the powerful influence of the role of socialisation in the creation of patterns of emotional experience in adults.[5] The individual burden of being a social actor is here swallowed up in a return to a kind of functional-organicist picture of human behaviour.

Cowlishaw (2003b:113) herself appears to experience Indigenous violence through the bourgeois sensibility of the vicarious part-time thrill, authenticated as such by its very ambivalence:

> It is moments of idiotic delight, as well as recognition of elements of myself in some wild, raging moment with Murri (local Aboriginal) friends, *and* in the feelings of exasperated citizens whose lives are disrupted, that have led me to this kind of analysis.

Cowlishaw has a strong preference for political explanations of Indigenous violence, often attributing it to the public performance of 'rage' (one of her favourite terms, along with 'outrage' and 'scandal' and their derivatives), a rage that arises from the unequal position of those who lack justice and recognition and who reject the compassion of others. In her *Public Culture* paper (2003b:121) ,she even opined that public violence could be usefully imagined 'as a way of breaking through the suffocating, complacent façade of national solicitude'. Cowlishaw's analyses tend to focus on the kind of violence that is most amenable to her evident desire to extract as much politicisation as possible out of the Indigenous 'disorder' that has occupied public debate in recent years, the kind that fits her 'resistance' model of interracial relations, and the kind that is itself racialised, especially things like stoushes between Murris and police in the main street of Bourke.

But a great deal of Indigenous violence, especially in remote settlements, occurs out of the sight of anyone other than community members themselves, frequently in the dead of night. It includes massive rates of self-harm. Most of the violence with which I was concerned in my 2001 paper is intra-Aboriginal in exactly this sense. It frequently occurs between unequals, and is at its worst in communities with small non-Indigenous minorities and the least severe histories of dispossession or overt discrimination. My paper should have been met on its own terms, not on ground shifted sideways to the illusory moral safety of resistance politics.[6]

Cowlishaw goes to great lengths to hold onto her model based on 'public violence', such as rioting, and to extend it by implication to an unqualified and open category of Indigenous violence of any kind. She does this in one instance by the device of an invisible but imagined and constantly 'lurking', critical non-Indigenous audience watching 'Aboriginality' being played out. This ghostly presence, only 'sometimes present in the flesh', 'enhances community loyalty to displays of rage or disorder' (Cowlishaw 2004b:315). This zeal to put positive moral-political spin on almost anything so long as it can be defined as an exhibition of 'Aboriginality' is ideologically driven and unethnographic, resting too much on surmise, possibly hope. In that it is unethnographic in this sense and distorted by political ideology it represents an act of bad faith towards the reader. It is also a variety of 'redemptive talk', something Cowlishaw is at pains to denigrate in others, and thus two-voiced (2003b:104).[7]

Cowlishaw (e.g. 2004a:240–5) has a good point when she identifies, as a fact, Indigenous refusal of modernising goodwill, albeit she is not the first to do so.[8] Her model predicts that her own passionate interventions on behalf of Murris as victims of whitefellas' racism will give rise to a similar refusal and resentment.

Cowlishaw (2003b:120) wants us to accept 'the normalcy of violence' because to deny it is to remove from scrutiny entrenched forms of governance such as the legal and illegal use of violence by members of police forces. 'The breaking of shop windows also engages the logic of terrorism—as an expression of rage and frustration that systematic injustice and derogation are refused recognition' (2003b:121). So rioters and terrorists are reacting on the basis of a 'logic' and to 'systematic injustice', and here once again Cowlishaw offers us the conjunction of *Reason* and the *Honourable Cause*, two very important bourgeois values if ever there were, and bound to win support—until one thinks about the implication here of a moral justification for the deliberate killing of non-combatant strangers. It is notable that in the revised version of this paper as a chapter in a book she inserted, after the equivalent of this sentence: 'But unlike terrorists, Murris do not attack their enemies physically or seek to engender physical fear. I am arguing that there is an expressive and subversive logic to Murri transgression' (Cowlishaw 2004a:163).

I am sure Cowlishaw would reject the implication that there is a single common heroically political basis for both a riot against 'police' in a New South Wales town and a young man killing his partner by penetration with a firestick in Arnhem Land. In one paper she (2003b:120) said that her aim was 'to show the sense violence makes in reproducing a cultural domain wherein the relationship between white and black citizens gets played out as a realm of tension and conflict and as a source of racial identities'. But she (2003b:114) also says that her attention there was 'limited to public expression of the kind of violence which attracts disapproval and legal sanction' and she did not there deal with 'the verbal violence of derogation' nor 'domestic violence'.

This elision was astonishing, in that the paper was heavily focused on the contemporary debate in which the extreme statistics of intra-Aboriginal violence and sexual abuse were both the trigger for the debate and the most urgent matters requiring action. This serious public discussion has arisen not because of some non-lethal us-and-them biffo with the cops outside a country pub but because of the extremely high levels of intra-Aboriginal crimes of the most brutal kind, including homicides, assaults on the aged, and the rape of infants. After sliding the discussion from one type of 'disorder' to the other, Cowlishaw (2003b:114) ended her paper on a note that was breathtakingly Panglossian: Public riots have a functional interpretation and a moral justification as well, based on the reactions of one 'race' to the behaviour of another. They are expressions of righteous black rage caused by the unwanted solicitude of a naïve if well-intentioned non-Indigenous public.

Archaeologists' broken skulls

Cowlishaw (2003a:9) dismissed the evidence I adduced from palaeopathological studies as to the prevalence of interpersonal violence in Aboriginal Australia prior to colonisation, trivialising it as 'archaeologists' broken skulls'. I did actually check that part of my paper with two senior physical anthropologists/prehistorians prior to settling the text (Sutton 2001:152–3, 166–7), but it was *Aboriginal* broken skulls that were at issue and I stand by that material as apposite and convincing as to the central propositions in question: that there was serious and statistically frequent interpersonal violence in pre-colonial Australia, and women suffered more from serious cranial fractures than did men. I made no argument for a simple transfer of identical behaviours from then till now.

Cowlishaw (2003a:9) also chided me for using 'selected nineteenth-century observations' on Aboriginal interpersonal violence. No, I used 14 sources written by professional anthropologists based on fieldwork carried out from the 1920s to the 1980s or 1990s, three colonial era primary sources, plus the *30* different sources utilised by Bronislaw Malinowski (1963) in his 1913 survey of ethnographic information on Aboriginal spousal relationships. These 47 sources are, in my view, well representative of the large range available.

Cowlishaw's (2003a:9) objection to this material, however, was not that it showed a false picture of levels of pre-contact violence, or of the marked gender skewing of cranial injuries which I summarised, but that I had confused the form and function of violence in 'an autonomous polity' with those in 'colonial conditions'. From this it would follow falsely that there is little ground for thinking that young men reproduce much if anything of the behaviours of older men in their kin networks as a consequence of imitation or of their own socialisation as to gender

roles and privileges, for example, over the first few generations of contact with the new conditions.[9] Once 'colonial conditions' supervene, apparently, a different polity provides the unseen hand generating violence, but for Cowlishaw the violence is still rooted in the polity, here defined in quite stratospheric terms.

But in my view it is rooted much more immediately in the dynamic local polity of competitive inter-personal and gender relationships, in a cultural world where jealous rage is not normally suppressed during child socialisation, where berserks are legitimated childhood reactions to thwarted desires, where, under recently sedentary conditions, dispersal is no longer the favoured option during conflict, and where drugs, especially alcohol, act as disinhibitors for strong emotions. In other words, it is rooted much less in the realms of broad social control and colonial resistance, with their loaded hints of the collective good, and much more in the struggle of the person, than Cowlishaw seems willing to allow.

Intellectuals, organic and inorganic

As an 'intellectual', Cowlishaw distances herself from persons like myself who are 'unreflective', possibly 'expert' but also 'innocent', and who indulge in 'superficial logic' and 'foolish simplifications' (2003a:2, 9, 10, 15 n31). I am someone who 'in several places [in my 2001 paper was] groping briefly towards a more complex understanding of cultural dynamics' but who unfortunately also described a relevant debate in 'banal terms' (2003a:14, 15). My alleged history/culture binarism was 'crude' (2003b:110). Although epitomising the national 'goodwill' towards Aborigines, I also epitomised 'misrecognition' (2003b:109). On this condescending and contemptuous evidence I occupy the position of the neo-primitive, along with 'rednecks' and 'shopkeepers', or in more Aboriginal terms playing the role of the *myall*, or, in pop-anthropological terms, the mere creature of *habitus*. Unlike Murris, however, I am apparently not an 'organic intellectual' (2003b:115).

Indeed, in my 2001 paper I was conscious of being not just a voyeur in the domain I was describing but also unavoidably a player, a participant-observer who was also at that moment acting as informant. My policy-related opinions stemmed from my position as a citizen, not as an academic analyst per se, even though the information I used in the text often came from academic sources or from my research time in Aboriginal communities since the 1960s. I do not deny

that I expected more people to listen to someone with the relevant experience than to someone without it. I also stated in the paper (2001:157 n1) that it was written for a general readership rather than a specialist anthropological one, and indeed it was given as a public address, even though, as a tribute to those for whom the lecture was named, it was published in the academic journal founded by Ronald Berndt, *Anthropological Forum*. Nevertheless, Cowlishaw's (2003a:3) reproach of me for producing an 'anthropology … that tries to take up a governmental position' is quite misdirected. It is also revealing of her view of the anthropological enterprise.

Of course I wanted to influence policy. I was compelled by exasperation at the mind-boggling gap between what I was seeing in communities or reading about in others' reports, on the one hand, and the lofty world of bureaucratic and political futurism on the other. The emperor had no clothes. But while my views on policy were influenced by anthropological knowledge and years of field experience they did not themselves constitute anthropological propositions. The same is true of the policy commentaries of many anthropologists. They have the right to speak up without always presenting every work as an exercise in academic anthropology.

'Judging traditions'—the original title of my paper—is a normal and I think unavoidable part of one's critical and ethical approach to one's own society and any other, as an individual, but in my view it is not itself an intrinsic part of anthropological practice. It can be informed by ethnographic knowledge, but to make it an integral dimension of 'anthropology as cultural critique' is to politicise the discipline to a point of unbearable strain. Although Cowlishaw (2003b:110) reproved me for suggesting that traditions ought to be judged on their contemporary merits by 'anthropology'—which was not my suggestion—she herself expresses moral judgements about the racist subcultures of country 'shopkeepers', and about systemic corruption within Aboriginal organisations, as well she might. That these behaviours are based significantly on longstanding cultural practices and systems of value—traditions, if you like—does not quarantine them from her criticism, nor should it.

But Cowlishaw's general approach is to produce a detailed and strong critique of 'whitefellas', for example in her pervasive accounts of their racism, but only an elusive, seldom-found critique of 'blackfellas', whose own racism, for example, merits only very brief discussion. Even if one takes the view that

criticism is inseparable from ethnography across an ethnic divide—which I don't—'the stronger version of cross-cultural juxtaposition works dialectically in all phases of a project of critical ethnography: there are critiques at both ends, of both societies' (Marcus & Fischer 1986:163).

At first sight Cowlishaw's approach seems to be to produce an intellectual or anthropological work every time. But her recent work is inextricably bound up with *parti-pris* political argument every time. It is as if anthropology for Cowlishaw is primarily a wing or instrument of political activism. This might explain why she is able to read comments on policy failure as 'anthropology' (Cowlishaw 2003a:3). It is a view of the discipline that I reject.

'A puzzling amount of publicity'

One of Cowlishaw's themes in her attack was that certain things I wrote or said became subject to media attention. She (2003a:6) complained that Roger Sandall's (2001) book *The Culture Cult*, 'like Sutton's talk, gained a puzzling amount of publicity in the public press', and she listed some of the press references to my work (2003a:13 n1). The newspapers which published condensed versions of my 2001 paper and material arising from interviews with me came to me, not I to them. What remains puzzling is what motivation lies behind Cowlishaw's focus on this issue.

Cause and effect

Cowlishaw (2003a:5) is perhaps obliged by theoretical considerations to decry my suggestions about causes and effects in Aboriginal history because, as also in the case of binary terms, causal language itself is philosophically uncool. She says, for example, that Indigenous violence has significant connections to the moral universe of 'redemptive talk [etc.]' and she will 'explore such connections here, *not as cause and effect*, but rather as an ongoing living relationship' (2003b:104, emphasis added). She refers to 'cause and effect logic' as foolish simplification (2003a:9).

Yet it is clear that, like anyone who cuts up onions with a sharp knife, Cowlishaw engages in a fully operational, performative model of cause and effect. She says, for example, that among Indigenous peoples a 'social disposition towards wrath' has been '*generated* by historical and current circumstances' (2003b:120).

She says local (i.e. Aboriginal, not shopkeepers') diagnoses are 'incomplete, but they provide crucial windows on the *generation* of violence and its inter-subjective permutations' (2003a:4). She talks about 'gaining a sense of how the violent, destructive and self-destructive acts that were thrust into the public view in mid-2001 have been *generated*' (2003a:7). Much of the thrust of her 2003b essay in fact is that political and racial hurt *generates* rage which ends in the effect of brutality. It is not convincing, then, to be told by Cowlishaw (2003b:104) that all she is doing is 'exploring' an 'ongoing, living relationship', while drawing the connections between redemptive talk and violence, as if indulging in an art form. She is attributing cause.

Intervention

Cowlishaw (2003b:111) suggested that my proposal for remedy of Indigenous problems caused by intervention was 'more intervention'. In the short term I do support greater intervention where there is, for example, an unmet need to protect vulnerable individuals. This need has been increasing in recent decades, and interventionist strategies have been increasingly a matter of demand from Aborigines, not just from members of the wider society. But in the longer term I consider it false to assume that more intervention will remove the underlying factors at work. In that sense I question the present vast *intervention* of an officially maintained and publicly funded organisational racial separatism.

That includes being in favour of a gradual withdrawal of non-essential services from settlements and institutions which, without it, would have to make more of their own way in the world, perhaps even sink or swim. I conveyed this support for a fundamental reversal of interventionism in the very paper Cowlishaw regards simply as interventionist, and as having been written by a 'conservative' (2003a:7; Sutton 2001:125–6, 131). But are not the 'conservatives' in this domain those who cling to the failed idealisms of the seventies, and, perhaps, those who work collaboratively to entrench their marginal status instead of making pathways out of it?

Cowlishaw's writing of recent years depends on and reinforces race and racism as a continuing dichotomous factor in Australian life. Inasmuch as her work filters through to the wider world, it provides fuel for racial separatists and may to some extent be in the business of the self-fulfilling prophecy. She is

somewhat coy, for example, about the degree and pace of social integration and interaction between persons of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal origins, for while 'interracial marriages' in the Bourke case are discussed as in her 2004 book, the descriptions are synchronic and lacking in statistical detail (2004a:11–12, 60, 97, 99, 118). Many readers would be surprised to learn, for example, that between 1986 and 2001 the percentage of Indigenous–non-Indigenous marriages recorded in the Australian census as a whole was rising rapidly, from 46% to 68%.[10] The extent to which this reflects new Indigenous self-identifiers is unclear (Peterson & Taylor 2002:11), but the relevant point is that *acknowledged* Indigenous out-marriage is very substantial and has been rising.[11]

Even in the Bourke ATSIC region, in which Cowlishaw's focal rural community of Bourke is located, the 1996 census recorded that 43% of Indigenous marriages (formal or de facto) involved Indigenous–non-Indigenous unions, relatively low by New South Wales standards, high nevertheless.[12] And while Cowlishaw (2004a:118) tells us that '[m]arriages between individuals who are firmly located in different racial communities usually involve a white man marrying a black woman', and this may be true of Bourke as a town, in the 1996 census 41% of mixed marriages in the Bourke ATSIC region were between Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women. Whether such trends are still increasing will presumably be known once the results of the 2005 census are released.

Academic disciplines and public issues

My debate with Cowlishaw raises yet again the question of whether academic disciplines like anthropology or history should have undergone the burgeoning politicisation they have experienced in recent decades. To answer this by noticing that all academic pursuits carry the baggage of some kind of political positioning, however well submerged, is beside the point. The key question is whether or not scholars should, or should not, have tried harder to keep their academic work and teaching as much as practicable at arm's length from the promotion of a particular political point of view.[13] This is certainly feasible, even when the same scholars may well be pursuing parallel careers in print as political or policy activists. AP Elkin, ethnographer, teacher of anthropology, government adviser, and pamphleteer on Aboriginal affairs, comes to mind here, for example. And in case the Elkin example is ill-advised, on the grounds that he was a dry conserva-

tive of unaffectionate professional memory, the much more 'modern' and revered WEH Stanner was able to, as it were, compartmentalise his lives as scholarly anthropologist and commentator and adviser on Indigenous policy administration.[14] I do not question the legitimacy of this kind of pathway.

But it has become almost commonplace to encounter ethnographically couched and historically framed texts that are also *inherently* acts of attempted political persuasion and which exhibit just too many signs of self-censorship. Some are suffused with the moral tone of a secular jeremiah, the worst examples descending into cant. Relevant factual evidence is sometimes obscured or omitted from academic works about Indigenous Australia on what appear to be the grounds of a politically based selectivity, as if this were in an act both of love and of war. For a small few writers, virtually their entire written output can be classed as an exercise in post-colonial polemics, one usually aimed at saving the Indigenes and burying the West—apart from the virtuous author, whose absolution from embarrassing privileges and perhaps survivor guilt becomes the primary underlying purpose of the reformative or critical text. Such writing is principally not about the building of a body of coherent, defensible and ultimately rejectable knowledge, but about the real-estate model of the primary purpose of intellectual endeavour: it's all about *position, position, position*.

Recent philosophical lending of weight to a counter-scientific view of social and cultural studies has probably provided some of the enabling conditions for furthering this sort of decadent, mediaevalising development whereby the ethnographic text is inseparable from the moral tract. To suggest a return in emphasis to a more scientific and less politicised paradigm of social and cultural knowledge is to court likely backlash not only from those whose anthropology is primarily a medium for the expression of their moral selves, but from an unreflective resistance to earlier paradigms, and from a deep-seated addiction to the novel, that would make Renaissance and Enlightenment scholars feel very much out of place today.[15] For them, a refreshed classicism and a powerful shift to a detached secularisation were energising, and integral to the New Learning and the sudden growth of scientific knowledge.

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NOTES

1. Although Cowlishaw (2003a:11) appeared to admit this sort of failing in her self-criticism of *Black, white or brindle* (Cowlishaw 1988), it is reproduced more strongly in her 2004 book and the 1988 one actually gives us a more concrete idea of the town's non-Indigenous population at the time. Occasional references to, for example, 'ideological diversity' among Bourke's whites (2004a:175) are generally overwhelmed by a picture of their homogeneity. Without suggesting this asymmetrical approach is justified, I do think it is a very easy pattern to fall into.

2. Although this same particular position was clearly held from page 1 of his now famous work, Robert Edgerton's book *Sick societies* (1992) has become a *bête noire* for many who wish to read it as an attack on native cultures from an ethnocentric Western perspective. It is clear from such reactions that his text is not always read carefully and fully, or at all, by many of his detractors.

3. For example, Pearson (2000a, b, 2003). Pearson receives high praise from Cowlishaw (2003b:105 fn7, 110 fn12).

4. Bell and Nelson (1989) were the first to break the relative silence, but in the aftermath of the furore that followed their paper another decade was to pass before similar matters again became publicly discussed to the same extent.

5. Cowlishaw's 1982 paper on Aboriginal child socialisation was a significant one and I regret not having used it in my 2001 paper.

6. John Morton (1998) has shown persuasively that Cowlishaw's resistance model of Aboriginal history was ideologically overdrawn, only partially corresponded to Indigenous views, and was based on her own desire to be seen as radical. Similarly, Tim Rowse (1990:189) analysed what he called her 'exaggeration of the force of the culture of opposition' in her 1988 book.

7. The instability of Cowlishaw's authorial position was earlier dissected by Rowse (1990:185–6).

8. AO Neville (1951:276) wrote: '[the coloured people] have been apt to resent the well-intentioned approaches even of their white friends'.

9. I make these observations partly on the basis of long-term fieldwork in majority Aboriginal social contexts with a mixture of persons, many of whom had grown up beyond the reach of the colonisers, plus their offspring who were born in the bush too but who were also educated at missions, and the latter's own offspring whose lives have been lived entirely based at settlements.

10. Peterson and Taylor (2002:11). This is many times the equivalent figure for African-American out-marriage, for example, which is around 10%.

11. There is no necessarily tight correlation between out-marriage and cultural change. My point here is about increasing social interconnection and integration and the decreasing racial closure.

12. For the rest of New South Wales in 2001 the intermarriage rate was 73% (Peterson & Taylor 2002:16).

13. While my 2001 paper addressed public policy, it condemned both sides of mainstream Australian politics for their bipartisan failure on Indigenous issues.

14. Stanner (1963:xvii) was acutely aware of the struggle to achieve a perspective on Indigenous Australians that was 'at one and the same time detached, informed and respectful'.

15. For a very apt example of the positive outcomes of being newly receptive to classical concerns, see Noam Chomsky's *Cartesian linguistics* (1966).

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